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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 002069

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E

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TAGS: MOPS MARR PTER PINR SOCI SO ET

SUBJECT: SOMALIA-TFG-ALIGNED FORCES STRUGGLING TO HOLD BELEDWEYNIE AFTER SEPTEMBER 27 CAPTURE; OPPOSITION REINFORCING

Classified By: Somalia Unit Counselor Bob Patterson for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 27, TFG-aligned forces again moved into eastern Beledweyne but may not be able to hold the strategic town due to risk aversion and lack of ammunition and reinforcements. TFG General Mukhtar on September 28 told Somalia Unit Poloff that al-Shabaab forces retreated from Beledweyne in advance of Mukhtar's forces and, with the exception of a few remaining al-Shabaab militia in western Beledweyne, remained approximately 25 kilometers outside of the town. Former TFG governor of Hiraan and recent defector to Hisbul Islam General Ma'ow reportedly left Beledweyne and took his forces to Buulo Burte to await reinforcements. Hiraan leaders said they are frustrated by lack of support from the TFG and Ethiopia and think their allies, such as ASWJ, are too engaged in their own fights against al-Shabaab to assist Beledweyne forces. Mukhtar said he does not know if his forces will be able to hold the town in the event of a counter attack from al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam. End summary.

¶2. (C) On September 28, TFG General Mukhtar, Member of Parliament Duqane, and Hiraan forces' spokesman Mohamed Nur told Somalia Unit PolOff that TFG-aligned forces on September 27 again moved into eastern Beledweyne but may not be able to hold the strategic town due to lack of ammunition and reinforcements. (Note: The September 27 capture of Beledweyne by TFG-aligned forces represents the fourth time the town has changed hands in the past two months. End note). General Mukhtar said al-Shabaab forces retreated from the town in advance of Mukhtar's forces and, despite a few remaining al-Shabaab militia in western Beledweyne, remained approximately 25 kilometers outside of the town. However, former TFG governor of Hiraan and recent defector to Hisbul Islam General Ma'ow reportedly left Beledweyne and took his forces to Buulo Burte to await reinforcements from Hisbul Islam leader Musa Arale. Mukhtar said he does not know if his forces will be able to hold the town in the event of a counter attack from al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam forces.

¶3. (C) Duqane, Mukhtar, and Nur expressed frustration over lack of support for their efforts in Beledweyne. MP Duqane said he was in touch with the TFG Speaker of Parliament and the Prime Minister yesterday but had little except statements of support. Mukhtar said more worrying is the fact that his forces have not received the additional ammunition that Ethiopia usually provides and that the Ethiopians have not come across the border to bolster his forces. Mukhtar said he was in communication with an Ethiopian General today but that he did not know if or when support would come from the Ethiopians. Muktar, Duqane, and Nur said they attended a

follow-up meeting with their ASWJ allies on September 21. All parties confirmed their commitment to work together to confront al-Shabaab. However, Mukhtar said ASWJ was not able to provide any support to his forces at that time because ASWJ had its own battle to fight in central Somalia against forces loyal to Sheikh Dahir Aweys. (Note: Mukhtar and other Hiraan leaders met with predominately northern Galgaduud ASWJ leaders earlier this month. End note.)

¶4. (C) Mohamed Nur told us that he fears Ma'ow's message of non-support to the TFG will begin to resonate with the local community if the town again changes hands because the people will think the TFG is not interested in their fate. He said he is attempting to use the media more proactively to counter Ma'ow's messaging. As an example, he said he convinced a local media outlet to retract a false story about TFG-aligned forces looting shops in western Beledweyne. He said media outlets in the region are very balanced and admitted that the TFG has been outpaced and outmaneuvered by Hisbul Islam and al-Shabaab when it comes to messaging.

¶5. (C) Comment: We are encouraging TFG-aligned leaders in Hiraan to step up their efforts to counter al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam media campaigns and to continue to reach out to the TFG for whatever support --political or financial-- the TFG may be able to provide. However, we think that the TFG's limited resources, coupled with lack of political will by some within the TFG, make it very unlikely the TFG will provide significant support to Hiraan. We think Beledweyne will continue to periodically switch hands due to Somalis' risk averse and long-standing tradition of using the threat of force, when faced with a stalemate, to open space for political machinations. Against this backdrop, Ma'ow will

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continue to attempt to position himself in the region as a political alternative to the TFG.

RANNEBERGER